

Into uncharted territory: The Coalition for Palestine and the challenges of a student movement entering its sophomore year

This fall will be a test of endurance for both the pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli sects of the campus community, as a war-weary world trudges into its second year of an escalating conflict.



OMAR OROZCO - THE TECH

Demonstrators gather outside of Lobby 7 on September 13, 2024.

By **Ellie Montemayor**
PUBLISHER

As the fourth week of fall semester approaches and students have begun to lock in their calendars and schedules over the coming months, an unexpected calm takes hold. Coming from the heels of the most chaotic spring semester in recent history—as the ongoing Israel-Hamas war continues to shake up communities nationwide—many had expected the fall semester to have begun the same way the previous one ended: conflict and pandemonium.

Instead, students were greeted with a normal start to the semester—for the most part.

The most striking event this semester thus far came in the form of a flyering incident during First-Year Orientation on August 26, where a group of pro-Palestinian protestors handed out flyers commenting on the Israeli-Palestine conflict that President Sally Kornbluth derided as antisemitic in a message to the Institute community just days later.

The campus also saw a small street-side protest in front of Lobby 7 that numbered below 100 in attendance, held on September 13, which ultimately did not attract the numbers and anti-administrative energy that some student organizers had expected it to generate.

(The movement's biggest win so far, they said at last week's protest, is the cancellation of the MISTI-Israel Lockheed Martin Seed Fund, a fellowship initiative between the

Institute and the aerospace company that funds research work abroad for students. MIT spokespeople maintain that the program, which began in 2019, came to its planned stopping point after the end of its cycle of funding.)

The pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli sects of campus continue to assert their right to free expression on campus, although in significantly more muted ways compared to last spring. Both groups were observed rallying new students over Orientation week in outreach-centered events, and an amplified presence of keffiyeh-wearing community members aligned with the Palestinian cause could be seen through that week. They hold speaker series and community gatherings among their communities, though with little disruption.

Part of the dampening in disruptive demonstrations may be due to changing administrative policies that have cracked down on "unregulated" acts of expression. The administration, last month, announced significant revisions to campus free expression policies, as per an August 29 email to the community from Vice Chancellor for Student Life Suzy Nelson, in a move that mirrors—but is still much more lax than—many other universities' start-of-semester attempts to avoid triggering another months-long campus-wide schism. It seems to have worked, for now.

As of now, no significant, controversy-stirring protest has broken ground on a war-weary

Institute tending to its wounds. The Class of 2028 has not yet been party to the discord that headlined the end of last semester, although most sent in their enrollment decisions to the admissions office just days before perhaps one of the most tumultuous weeks in recent Institute history.

Recapping the events of a historic spring

The spring saw the rise and fall of the occupation protests, a new wave of escalated pro-Palestinian action sparked by Columbia University's so-called Gaza Solidarity Encampment, which was first established on April 17. MIT's own tent city, the Scientists Against Genocide Encampment (SAGE), was put up on Kresge Oval just four days later on the 21st of that month, alongside a campus-wide walkout reportedly orchestrated in solidarity with the dozens of Columbia protestors who were quickly detained in mass arrests authorized by then-Columbia president Minouche Shafik.

Shafik, who was being investigated by a congressional house committee on charges of allowing antisemitism to suppurate on her campus, stepped down from her post early last month. She joined Harvard University's Claudine Gay and the University of Pennsylvania's Liz Magill in stepping down as their respective campuses' chief executives due to the fallout of the past fall and spring's protests.

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President Kornbluth outlines Institutional priorities for the new year

In an email to the MIT community on Sept. 5, MIT President Sally Kornbluth laid out a number of initiatives and priorities that the Institute is seeking to elevate in the new academic year. These included the MIT Collaboratives, the MIT GenAI Impact Consortium, the Climate Project at MIT, and developments towards "amplifying MIT's policy influence."

Kornbluth announced the inception of the MIT Collaborative, which is intended to bolster MIT's faculty, to "go big" and "purpose the most innovative ideas in their discipline" while promoting cross-pollination across fields. In October, the MIT Collaborative center under the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (SHASS) will begin, with a connectivity fund, among others, meant to foster collaboration between SHASS faculty and those from other schools at the Institute. In December, Kornbluth anticipates sharing an MIT Collaborative focused on the life sciences and health, with the goal of "inspiring and delivering high-

impact solutions."

The current state of AI development, at which MIT has been at the forefront of, has seen great change and great controversy. Following the success of a symposium on generative AI in the fall of 2023 and strong interest in the impact papers published by faculty in the previous academic year, the Institute will launch the GenAI Impact Consortium, which will continue to allow MIT to assert its position as a leader at the forefront of AI.

One of Kornbluth's largest projects that she's undertaken at the Institute, namely the Climate Project at MIT, announced its mission heads at an event Sep 16. Kornbluth also highlighted an effort by the Institute to "foster and inform evidence-based policymaking."

Kornbluth ended the note with optimism, stating "I look forward to joining all of you in focusing our strengths on the Institute's essential mission."

— Alex Tang

Ten elite universities settle for disclosed amount in financial aid lawsuit; MIT not among them

A settlement of a total of \$284 million from seventeen universities implicated a lawsuit alleging collusion across these institutions in allocating financial aid for students.

MIT was one of the schools named. The list included Brown, Caltech, UChicago, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Duke, Emory, Georgetown, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, Notre Dame, UPenn, Rice, Vanderbilt, and Yale. Ten of the aforementioned schools have

settled for publicly disclosed values ranging from \$13.5 million at Chicago to \$55 million at Vanderbilt.

MIT has not yet settled for any amount: according to the settlement, those from MIT who are eligible must have received need-based financial aid from the fall of 2003 through the date the Court "enters an order preliminarily approving the Settlement."

— Alex Tang

Kornbluth highlights progress made by the Institute in a call for giving

In a message to the MIT community, President Sally Kornbluth took to galvanizing potential contributors to the Institute with an overview of the various initiatives that MIT has been developing since her assuming tenure.

Of note, Kornbluth wrote: "American universities have been in the news a lot lately, in ways that can tend to obscure their central mission and the value they bring to the world."

She began with the Climate Project at MIT, noting the Institute's long-standing

"pioneering contributions to fields related to climate change," but stated that the current status of the climate crisis necessitates a "different order of ambition, focus, scale, and collective im-

pact." Kornbluth described the legacy of support for such efforts, stating they will contribute to "develop[ing] and deliver[ing] technological, behavioral and policy solutions to the world in time to make a difference."

Kornbluth also reiterated the Institute's position as a leader in AI innovation and policy, noting the publication of 43 papers in the spring that have gained over 100,000 reads. This culminated from an invitation to the faculty to project roadmaps for the field, offer policy recommendations and spur calls for action.

The President concluded the note by thanking the continued support of benefactors to the Institute.

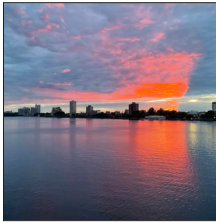
— Alex Tang

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WEATHER FORECAST

Weather Systems	Weather Fronts	Precipitation Symbols	Other Symbols
High Pressure	Trough	Snow	Fog
Low Pressure	Warm Front	Rain	Thunderstorm
Hurricane	Cold Front	Light	Haze
	Stationary Front	Moderate	
		Heavy	

Compiled by MIT Meteorology Staff and The Tech

End of Sunny & Warm Summer Weather

By **Adrienne Lai**
CHIEF METEOROLOGIST

The lovely weather of the start to cool approaches an end this weekend, with the first precipitation of the school year projected for the end of the week through the weekend. Plan accordingly for the career fair, as you might need to wait in a light rain shower to get into the event.

With the rain also comes cooler temperatures, with us leaving behind the nice summer warmth for the cooler fall weather. Time to hunker down and start fully focusing on school. Fall flavors are back at many cafés if you are looking for a sweet treat to reward yourself for getting through the first few weeks!

SEPTEMBER 19

SITUATION FOR NOON (ET)

Extended Forecast

Today: 60% chance of precipitation with showers most likely in the forming. High near 66°F (18°C) and east winds 7 mph.

Tonight: Low of 62°F (16.5°C) with a 50% chance of rain. Northeast winds 9-11 mph.

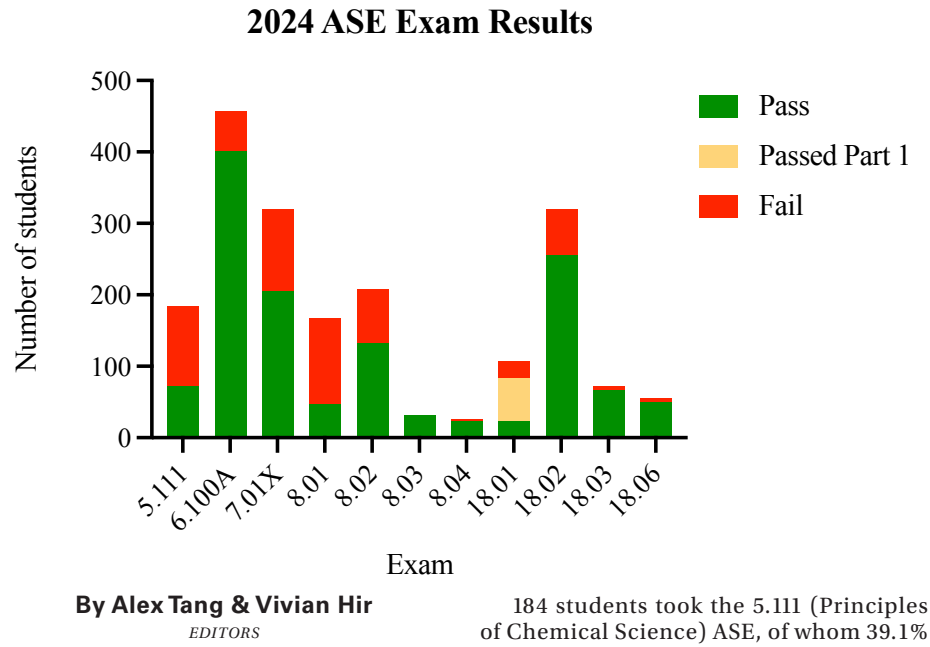
Friday: Early morning rain. High wind gusts at 28 mph northeast and a high near 69°F (20.5°C).

Saturday: Mostly cloudy with a high near 66°F (18°C) and a low of 57°F (14°C). Northeast winds 15-18 mph.

Sunday: Partly sunny with northeast winds 10-18 mph. High of 65°F (18°C) and low of 54°F (12°C).

In advanced standing: 2024 ASE results

The notoriously difficult chemistry Advanced Standing Exam pass rate climbed 7% from two years prior



est number of test takers was the 7.01x (Introductory Biology) with a 64.06% pass rate and 18.02 (Multivariable Calculus) ASE with a 79.69%— both had 320 students.

For 18.01, 59 students who passed Part 1 were recommended for placement into 18.01A, while 24 students who passed both parts were placed into 18.02. A total of 107 students took the 18.01 ASE.

The physics department offered the Math Skills Assessment, an online test required for first-year students who do not have credit for 8.01 (Physics I) or 18.01 (Calculus). The purpose of the assessment is to recommend students which math or physics GIR to take. This year's Math Skills Assessment had 729 first-year students take the assessment. 232 students took the optional 18.01A assessment and 171 took the optional 18.02 assessment.

Prior to 2023, the assessment was called the Math Diagnostic Assessment. According to Young, the purpose for changing the name from "Diagnostic" to "Skills" is to make it clear to students that the assessment was "just a snapshot of their current level and provide them with resources to practice areas that might need more practice."

Select ASEs will be available during the final exam period, while the Independent Activities Period (IAP) ASEs will take place in late January or early Feb. Unlike the summer ASEs, these ASEs will be taken for a letter grade.

In memoriam:
Albert 'Al' Zesiger '51, the namesake of the Zesiger Center

Albert 'Al' Zesiger '51, the namesake of the Zesiger Center, died at the age of 95 on August 16. Zesiger and his wife, Barrie, were generous benefactors to the Institute. The Al '51 & Barrie Zesiger Sports and Fitness Center Pool opened to the community in 2002. Zesiger was a passionate athlete, running 18 marathons and swimming from Alcatraz to San Francisco on numerous occasions. Per his request, there was no funeral or memorial service held.

— Alex Tang

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The Tech (ISSN 0148-9607) is published periodically on Thursdays during the academic year (except during MIT vacations) and monthly during the summer by *The Tech*, Room W20-483, 84 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Mass. 02139. POSTMASTER: Please send all address changes to our mailing address: *The Tech*, P.O. Box 391529, Cambridge, Mass. 02139-7029. TELEPHONE: Editorial: (617) 253-1541. Business: (617) 258-8324. Facsimile: (617) 258-8226. EMAIL: tt-general@mit.edu (general), tt-ads@mit.edu (advertising). Advertising, subscription, and type-setting rates available. Entire contents © 2024 *The Tech*. Printed by Graphic Developments, Inc.

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This issue of *The Tech* is sponsored by: THE KNIGHT SCIENCE JOURNALISM PROGRAM @ MIT

SPORTS BLITZ

Friday, September 6th:

- Women's Volleyball defeated Colby College 3–1

Saturday, September 7th:

- Sailing placed in 2nd at MIT, 12th at Yale, and 5th at Harvard
- Women's Volleyball defeated Marine Maritime Academy 3–0
- Men's Water Polo defeated Austin College 12–0
- Women's Soccer defeated Lesley University 3–0
- Field Hockey defeated the University of New England 5-0
- Women's Volleyball defeated Endicott College 3–0
- Men's Water Polo lost to Air Force 13–14
- Football defeated Bridgewater State University 37–17

Sunday, September 8th:

- Men's Water Polo lost to Fordham University 10–26
- Men's Soccer defeated Western New England University 2–1
- Men's Water Polo lost to Fordham University 3–21

Tuesday, September 10th:

- Field Hockey lost to Endicott College 1-4

Wednesday, September 11th:

- Men's Soccer defeated Roger Williams College 2–0

Friday, September 13th:

- Field Hockey defeated Western New England University 3-0
- Women's Volleyball defeated Whittier College 3-1
- Men's Water Polo defeated Caltech 24–9

Saturday, September 14th:

- Sailing placed in 7th and 12th at MIT and 6th at Harvard
- Women's Cross Country placed 2nd at the Maribel Sanchez Souther Invitational
- Men's Cross Country placed 1st at the Maribel Sanchez Souther Invitational
- Women's Volleyball defeated Christopher Newport University 3–2
- Women's Soccer defeated Brandeis University 2–1
- Men's Water Polo lost to Pomona-Pitzer 9–13
- Women's Volleyball defeated UMass Boston 3–0
- Men's Soccer lost to UMass Boston 1–3
- Men's Water Polo lost to Redlands 12–18

Sunday, September 15th:

- Women's Soccer tied Middlebury College 2–2
- Men's Water Polo lost to Whittier College 9–14

Wednesday, September 18th:

- Men's Soccer lost to Wentworth Institute of Technology 0–1
- Field Hockey lost to Tufts University 0–2

The Ig Nobel Prize ceremony returns to MIT for the first time in 20 years

The ceremony returns to in-person activities after being held online for four years

By **Vivian Hir**
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

On Sept. 12, the 34th First Annual Ig Nobel Prize ceremony took place at MIT's 10-250 lecture hall. Founded in 1991 by Marc Abrahams, the Ig Nobel Prize awards unusual and humorous scientific research that "first make people laugh, then make them think." The 34th annual ceremony awarded ten prizes across a diverse range of topics, from the efficacy of fake medicine to mammals that breathe through their anuses. The theme of this year's ceremony is Murphy's Law, a saying that if something can go wrong, then it will go wrong.

The 2024 ceremony marks the return of the Ig Nobel Prize back to MIT, the original site of the ceremony. The ceremony was organized in collaboration with the MIT Press and MIT Museum. From 1991 to 1994, the Ig Nobel Prizes was held in MIT, but then moved to Sanders Theatre at Harvard University from 1995 to 2019. The ceremonies were online from 2020 to 2023 due to the COVID pandemic, making this year's ceremony the first in-person ceremony since 2019.

The six presenters for the Ig Nobel Prize were the following Nobel Prize laureates: Abhijit Banerjee, Moungi Bawendi, Esther Duflo, Jerome Friedman, Eric Maskin, and Robert Merton.

Besides introducing the winner's work and presenting the awards to the winners, the Ig Nobel Prize ceremony has many comedic traditions, including the mini-opera and 24/7 lectures. Called "The International Murphy's Law Song Competition Contest Opera," the mini-opera featured four contestants who sang funny songs about Murphy's Law, and all of their performances followed Murphy's Law. On the other hand, the 24/7 lectures had speakers like Profes-

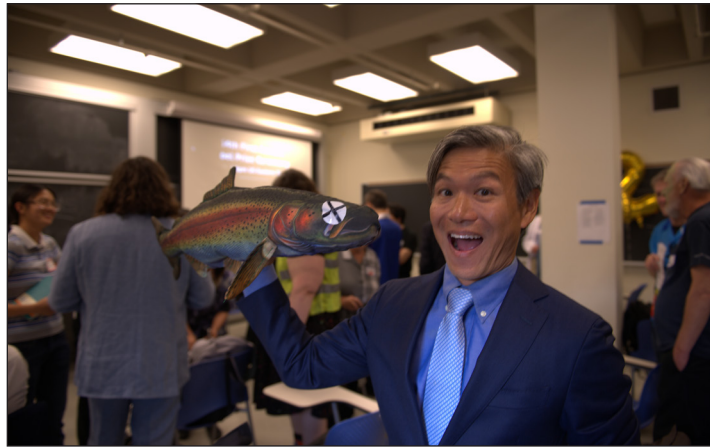


PHOTO COURTESY OF ANSON SO

James ("Jimmy") C. Liao, winner of the Physics Prize for demonstrating and explaining the swimming abilities of a dead trout, proudly shows his prop.

sor Esther Duflo explain their topic in 24 seconds, followed by a summary in 7 words.

The Anatomy Prize winners, Dr. Marjolaine Willems and Dr. Roman Hossein, presented their research on whether the Earth's hemisphere plays a role in the direction of hair whorls. From their study on twins in France and Chile, they found that counterclockwise whorls were more common in the Southern hemisphere. In an interview with The Tech, Dr. Hossein said that "it was great to be recognized for something." Dr. Hossein doesn't expect further funding, but quipped that "I can convince students to work under me" because the project received the Ig Nobel Prize.

Physics Prize recipient Professor James ("Jimmy") C. Liao brought a toy fish as a prop for his amusing speech about his research on the swimming abilities of a dead trout. Liao's research on this unconventional topic was for his biology PhD thesis at Harvard 20 years ago. Contrary to what one may expect, Liao found that the eddies and fluid movement in wa-

Upcoming Sports Events

FRIDAY 20

Women's Tennis
ITA New England Regional Championships

Men's Tennis
MIT Invitational

Women's Volleyball
vs UC Santa Cruz 4:30 p.m.

SATURDAY 21

Women's Tennis
ITA New England Regional Championships

Men's Tennis
MIT Invitational

Sailing
at Brown, Dartmouth, and Tufts

Football
vs Alfred State College 12 p.m.

Women's Soccer
at Mount Holyoke College 2 p.m.

Women's Volleyball
vs Johns Hopkins University 3 p.m.

Men's Soccer
vs United States Coast Guard Academy 4 p.m.

Women's Volleyball
vs New York University 5:30 p.m.

Field Hockey
at Smith College 6 p.m.

SUNDAY 22

Women's Tennis
ITA New England Regional Championships

Men's Tennis
MIT Invitational

Sailing
at Brown, Dartmouth, and Tufts

TUESDAY 24

Women's Volleyball
vs United States Coast Guard Academy 6 p.m.

WEDNESDAY 25

Women's Soccer
vs Tufts University 4 p.m.

Field Hockey
vs Amherst College 6:30 p.m.

Men's Soccer
at Suffolk University 7 p.m.

FRIDAY 27

Men's Tennis
ITA New England Regional Championships

SATURDAY 28

Men's Tennis
ITA New England Regional Championships

Sailing
at United States Coast Guard Academy, Boston University, and at MIT

Men's Water Polo
vs Johns Hopkins University 11 a.m.

Women's Soccer
at Smith College 12 p.m.

Football
at Salve Regina 12 p.m.

Field Hockey
vs Springfield College 1 p.m.

Women's Volleyball
vs Springfield College 1 p.m.

Men's Soccer
vs Salve Regina 1:15 p.m.

Men's Water Polo
at Brown University 3 p.m.

SUNDAY 29

Men's Tennis
ITA New England Regional Championships

Sailing
at United States Coast Guard Academy

TUESDAY 1

Women's Volleyball
vs Salve Regina University 6 p.m.

Men's Soccer
vs Endicott College 6 p.m.

WEDNESDAY 2

Field Hockey
at Roger Williams University



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANSON SO

Prof. Moungi Bawendi, presenter of the Ig Nobel Prize, smiles widely at the camera.

A companion event called the "Ig Nobel Face-to-Face" happened on Sept. 14 in the MIT Museum. Free with museum admission, the event had new Ig Nobel Prize winners ask each other questions about their research and answer questions from the audience. A video webcast of the ceremony can be found on YouTube.

WORLD & NATION is a two-page column featuring news articles syndicated from a selection of major newspaper outlets, covering topics of public interest and critical information which extend beyond the bounds of The Tech's coverage as centered around the MIT and local community. Ownership of syndicated content is retained under their original respective publications, and is republished in this format to serve as an easily-accessible, printed digest for The Tech's readership.

The column consists of two pages, with Side A focused on US news and politics and Side B on topics of international concern. The articles featured here are abridged as to contain only their most essential points; readers are directed to read more about an article from its original publication.

Fed slashes interest rates by a half point, an aggressive start to its first easing campaign in four years

The Federal Reserve on Wednesday enacted its first interest rate cut since the early days of the Covid pandemic, slicing half a percentage point off benchmark rates in an effort to head off a slowdown in the labor market.

With both the jobs picture and inflation softening, the central bank's Federal Open Market Committee chose to lower its key overnight borrowing rate by a half percentage point, or 50 basis points, affirming market expectations that had recently shifted from an outlook for a cut half that size.

—Jeff Cox, FROM CNBC
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

Harvey Weinstein pleads not guilty to new criminal charge in New York

Harvey Weinstein is pleading not guilty to a new criminal charge. The disgraced movie mogul, 72, was arraigned Wednesday in New York state court in Manhattan. Seated in a wheelchair and sporting a bandage on his right hand, Weinstein pleaded not guilty to a first-degree criminal sexual act against an accuser who has not been publicly identified.

The charge stems from Weinstein allegedly sexually assaulting a woman in a downtown Manhattan hotel between April 29 and May 6, 2006. The woman, only identified as Jane Doe, "has not shared this story publicly before, nor does she want to be identified at this time," her attorney, Lindsay M. Goldbrum, said in a statement Wednesday.

—Brendan Morrow, FROM USA TODAY
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

21 juveniles charged with making school threats in South Carolina

Nearly two dozen juveniles have been charged in connection with online threats made against schools in South Carolina since early September, the authorities said on Tuesday.

The South Carolina Law Enforcement Division said in a news release that 21 people had been charged for making what it called "extremely serious" threats targeting schools. Many of the threats were shared on social media, the agency said.

"School threats are not a joke," Chief Mark Keel of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division said in a statement. "Law enforcement takes every threat seriously, and everyone needs to understand that there are serious consequences."

—Alexandra E. Petri, FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

More than 100 ex-Republican officials call Trump 'unfit to serve' and endorse Harris

More than 100 Republican former national security and foreign policy officials on Wednesday endorsed Kamala Harris for president in a joint letter, calling Donald Trump "unfit to serve" another term in the White House.

Former officials from the presidential administrations of Republicans Ronald Reagan, George H W Bush, George W Bush and Donald Trump, as well as Democrats Bill Clinton and Barack Obama voiced their support for Harris, the Democratic nominee for president in this November's election. They were joined by some former GOP members of Congress.

—Maya Yang, FROM THE GUARDIAN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

Sean 'Diddy' Combs jailed by judge after sex trafficking indictment

Sean "Diddy" Combs headed to jail Tuesday to await trial in a federal sex trafficking case that accuses him of presiding over a sordid empire of sexual crimes protected by blackmail and shocking acts of violence.

The music mogul is charged with racketeering conspiracy and sex trafficking. The indictment against him lists allegations that go back to 2008.

He's accused of inducing female victims and male sex workers into dragged-up, sometimes dayslong sexual performances dubbed "Freak Offs." The indictment also refers obliquely to an attack on his former girlfriend, the R&B singer Cassie, that was captured on video.

—Larry Neumeister, Michael Sisak, & Jennifer Peltz
FROM AP NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

Trump targeted in second apparent assassination attempt

Kristen Holmes, John Miller, Kate Sullivan, Evan Perez & Jeremy Herb

FROM CNN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 16, 2024

The FBI is investigating what it said is an apparent assassination attempt on Donald Trump at his Florida golf club Sunday, the second time in two months there's been an apparent attempt on the former president's life.

Trump is safe and was not harmed in the incident, his campaign said. Palm Beach County Sheriff Ric Bradshaw said during a Sunday news conference that his office was informed at 1:30 p.m. ET of shots fired by the Secret Service, when agents fired at a man who had a rifle in the bushes along the perimeter of the Trump International Golf Club.

Trump had been playing golf at the time, moving between holes five and six, a source briefed on the matter told CNN.

A Secret Service agent spotted

a rifle barrel with a scope sticking out of the fence of the golf course and "immediately engaged" with the person, Bradshaw said.

The agent who spotted the rifle, Bradshaw said, is part of a team that stays a hole or two ahead of Trump on the course. The person was 300 to 500 yards away from Trump, an official said.

The person fled the scene in a car and was spotted by a witness, which ultimately helped law enforcement officials locate the vehicle driving north on I-95 in Martin County, one county to the north of Palm Beach.

"We are able to catch a witness that came to us and said, 'Hey, I saw the guy running out of the bushes, he jumped into a black Nissan and I took a picture of the vehicle and the tag,' which was great," Bradshaw said.

Authorities alerted the Martin County Sheriff's Office, which detained the person. The witness was able to then identify the man.

David Aronberg, State Attorney

House Republicans reject own funding bill as shutdown nears

Scott Wong, Syedah Asghar, Kyle Stewart, & Brennan Leach

FROM NBC NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

House Republicans on Wednesday defeated their own plan to avert a government shutdown at the end of the month, with the party divided over the length of a short-term funding bill and what, if anything, should be attached to it.

It was an embarrassing blow to Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., who had yanked the same funding package off the floor last week amid growing GOP defections, only to watch it collapse on Wednesday in a vote that seemed doomed from the start.

The vote was 222-220 with two members voting present. In all, fourteen Republicans voted against the package, and three Democrats — Reps. Jared Golden of Maine, Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington and Don Davis of

North Carolina — voted for it.

Thirteen days before money runs out for the federal government, there is still no bipartisan plan to stave off a shutdown. While the GOP-led House could try again, the focus now likely shifts to the Senate, where leaders in both parties agree a shutdown would be disastrous weeks before the election.

Johnson's plan called for extending funding at current spending levels for six months, through March 2025, and linking it with the SAVE Act, Donald Trump-backed legislation requiring that people show proof of citizenship to register to vote.

A GOP-only funding bill was always going to be a heavy lift for Johnson given Republicans' razor-thin majority and the fact that a number of GOP lawmakers — a mix of fiscal conservatives and defense hawks — had vowed for days to tank it.

Democrats want a "clean" three-month funding patch with

nothing attached, and virtually all voted no on the Johnson plan. Many oppose the SAVE Act, noting that it is already illegal, and rare, for noncitizens to vote.

GOP opponents were comprised of some unusual bedfellows. Some conservatives said they never vote for stopgap funding bills, known as continuing resolutions, or CRs, while Armed Services Chairman Mike Rogers, R-Ala., has warned that half a year is too long for military spending to remain stagnant.

"That would be "devastating" to the Pentagon, the chairman told NBC News before the vote.

Other GOP defections included Reps. Lauren Boeert of Colorado; Matt Gaetz and Cory Mills, both of Florida; Nancy Mace of South Carolina; and Matt Rosendale of Montana.

But the overwhelming majority of rank-and-file Republicans backed Johnson's move, saying holding the vote would put lawmakers on record.

Harris holds slight lead over Trump in 2 battleground states

Emmy Martin

FROM POLITICO
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

Vice President Kamala Harris is narrowly leading former President Donald Trump in two critical battleground states and they are virtually tied in a third, according to polls conducted since last week's debate and released Wednesday.

New Quinnipiac University polls found that in a hypothetical two-way match-up, Harris leads Trump by 5 percentage points in both Michigan and Pennsylvania, 51 percent support to 46 percent, and leads by 1 percentage point in Wisconsin — well within the poll's 3-point margin of error in that state.

Another poll released by AARP Wednesday reaffirmed that the two candidates were "neck and neck" in Wisconsin. In a head-to-head matchup, Harris leads Trump by just 1 percentage point in the state, 49 percent to 48 percent support.

Wisconsin voters aged 50 and older favor Trump over Harris by 3 percentage points in a head-to-head race, the AARP poll found, with the former president's lead increasing to 12 percentage points among voters from ages 50 to 64. Harris is up 6 percentage points among seniors 65 years and older.

The polls published Wednesday marked some of the first high-quality polling data released since Harris and Trump took the stage in Philadelphia last week for their first — and likely only — head-to-head debate since each accepted their party's presidential nomination. Over 67 million people watched the match-up, of which the majority of respondents declared Harris the winner in an instant CNN/SSRS survey immediately after the debate.

"Almost all Wisconsin voters followed the debate either through watching it or the news, with 3-in-4 saying they watched," according to the AARP poll. Of the likely voters surveyed, 55 percent picked Harris as the winner, while

Israel planted explosives in pagers sold to Hezbollah

Sheera Frenkel & Ronen Bergman

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

Israel carried out its operation against Hezbollah on Tuesday by hiding explosive material within a new batch of Taiwanese-made pagers imported into Lebanon, according to American and other officials briefed on the operation.

The pagers, which Hezbollah had ordered from Gold Apollo in Taiwan, had been tampered with before they reached Lebanon, according to some of the officials. Most were the company's AR924 model, though three other Gold Apollo models were also included in the shipment.

The explosive material, as little as one to two ounces, was implanted next to the battery in each pager, two of the officials said. A switch was also embedded that could be triggered remotely to detonate the

explosives.

At 3:30 p.m. in Lebanon, the pagers received a message that appeared as though it was coming from Hezbollah's leadership, two of the officials said. Instead, the message activated the explosives. Lebanon's health minister told state media at least 11 people were killed and more than 2,700 injured.

The devices were programmed to beep for several seconds before exploding, according to three of the officials.

The American and other officials spoke on the condition of anonymity given the sensitive nature of the operation.

Hezbollah has accused Israel of orchestrating the attack but has described limited details of its understanding of the operation. Israel has not commented on the attack, nor said it was behind it.

On Wednesday, Gold Apollo sought to distance itself from the devices used in the attack, saying

that they had been made by another manufacturer. B.A.C. Consulting, which Gold Apollo said had an address in Budapest and made the pagers under a license. Efforts to contact B.A.C. were not immediately successful, and calls to a number listed on its website rang unanswered.

Independent cybersecurity experts who have studied footage of the attacks said it was clear that the strength and speed of the explosions were caused by a type of explosive material.

"These pagers were likely modified in some way to cause these types of explosions — the size and strength of the explosion indicates it was not just the battery," said Mikko Hypponen, a research specialist at the software company WithSecure and a cybercrime adviser to Europol.

Keren Elazari, an Israeli cybersecurity analyst and researcher at Tel Aviv University, said the attacks had targeted Hezbollah where they were most vulnerable.

Kashmir elections happen for first time since loss of statehood

Omkar Khandekar & Diaa Hadid

FROM NPR
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

Men and women filed into gender-segregated lines, huddling in shawls early Wednesday morning in this Himalayan territory. Many prepared to do something that they'd never done before: vote.

Across Indian-controlled Kashmir, residents are casting ballots in assembly elections that are being held for the first time in a decade — and since the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi stripped away the territory's statehood in 2019, a move that rights activists

said was followed by a dramatic clampdown on people's freedoms. The folks lining up to cast a ballot included Shahid, a 33-year-old businessman. He requested NPR withhold his family name, fearing reprisals by authorities if

he spoke freely, nodding to the police, border forces and soldiers who had fanned around the polling area. Ever since Kashmir's statehood was dismantled, Shahid says, "We are in an open jail. We can't protest against anything, even power cuts or water supply."

Shahid says he once ignored elections, like many in Kashmir who boycotted to protest India's rule of the territory. Now, he says, he's voting "so someone can fight for us."

It's a fight for the prosaic, like employment and services, and the political: to restore Kashmir's statehood, although analysts say a return of its partial autonomy is unlikely. That past autonomy was a nod to its unique status: it was India's only Muslim-majority state, part of a region straddling India and Pakistan, which both claim it. Kashmir was fought over by those nuclear-armed neighbors in three wars, and each administrators part of it.

Its special autonomy in India was largely symbolic, but analysts say its very existence irked Hindu nationalists, who saw it as a form of appeasement to India's minority Muslims. That was echoed in a campaign rally by the powerful interior minister, Amit Shah, who rallied supporters during federal elections this year, roaring into a crowd, "Tell me: Is Kashmir ours, or not?"

Perhaps to prevent violence, just as Kashmir's statehood was revoked in 2019, its phone lines and internet access were cut, a curfew was imposed, journalists and politicians were detained. So were hundreds of men, say residents, some over critical Facebook posts.

Even five years on, most residents — from those manning roadside stalls selling apples to shopkeepers and fertilizer traders — declined to speak to NPR reporters when asked about elections, saying they feared being punished by authorities.

Mass rape trial in France sheds light on alleged 'rape culture'

Linda Hervieux

FROM NBC NEWS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

This quaint village nestled among rolling hills in the south of France seems an unlikely setting for a crime so horrific it strained belief: Over a decade, police say dozens of men systematically raped a woman unconscious in her own bed, drugged by her husband of 50 years.

Dominique Pelicot, 71, a retired electrician, has admitted to orchestrating multiple rapes of Gisèle Pelicot, 72, offering her to a steady stream of men he met in an online chatroom and filming the repeated assaults until his arrest on unrelated charges in September 2020.

Over the next two years, police would identify 50 of 83 men they say were captured in over 20,000 photos and videos recovered from his computer.

While the mass trial — which began Sept. 2 in the regional capital of Avignon — has riveted France, women's rights advocates are hoping the case will prompt change in a society that they say is steeped in sexism and casual misogyny, where only 6% of rape complaints are prosecuted.

Some activists went further, describing a "rape culture" that allowed Dominique Pelicot to commit and direct unspeakable acts for so long. They wonder how many men knew what was happening in Mazan and didn't call the police, not even anonymously. And they suspect the problem of drugging and "date rape" is far more widespread than anyone knows.

The trial "has become a symbol of the worst that male violence can do," Anne-Cécile Mailfert, president of Fondation des Femmes, told NBC News.

In a move rarely seen in France, Pelicot refused anonymity.

Women like Mailfert have lauded her choice to go public with the "barbaric" details directed by the man who she had believed was a loving husband, caring father and doting grandfather. Her act of defiance has recast the trial as the story of her agency rather than her victimhood.

Cameras have tracked her striding into the Palais de Justice each morning, her head held high. Her face has appeared on the front page of newspapers and magazines, a determined gaze behind smoky sunglasses framed by copper bangs.

"I am a rapist, like the others in this room," Pelicot told the court Tuesday as his long-awaited testimony began.

"Today I'm taking back control of my life," Gisèle Pelicot testified on the third day of the trial, which is set to continue until mid-December. "Many women don't have the proof. I have the proof!"

Activists have praised her "dignified, courageous and radical" demeanor, in the face of sexual assaults that otherwise thrive by silencing women with shame and fear. And last weekend, thousands of supporters in Paris, Bordeaux, Marseille and other cities rallied in support of the woman who many are hoping will prompt other victims to come forward — and encourage police to more aggressively pursue cases of sexual assault.

U.N. body demands Israel end its 'unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory'

The United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted a nonbinding resolution on Wednesday demanding that Israel end its "unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory" within a year, a significant but symbolic move that highlighted growing international condemnation of Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people.

The Assembly's chamber in New York broke into applause after the resolution was approved by a vote of 124 to 14, with Israel and the United States in opposition and 43 other nations abstaining. The decision followed a landmark opinion issued in July by the International Court of Justice, the world's highest court, which said that Israel's occupation violated international law and should end "as rapidly as possible."

—Anushka Patil, FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

After fresh loss, Canada's Trudeau shows no sign of stepping down

Doubts about the leadership of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau intensified after his ruling Liberal Party suffered a second humiliating loss in a special election, but the unpopular leader is determined to cling to office ahead of a looming national vote.

The Liberals, who have governed for almost nine years, suffered a narrow defeat on Monday in a Montreal constituency that had been one of the party's safest seats.

The loss, following a defeat in Toronto in late June, reinforced the perception that Liberal prospects in the next national election are dim.

—David Ljunggren, FROM REUTERS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

US military aid packages to Ukraine shrink amid stockpile concerns

US military aid packages for Ukraine have been smaller in recent months, as the stockpiles of weapons and equipment that the Pentagon is willing to send Kyiv from its own inventory have dwindled. The shift comes amid concerns about US military readiness being impacted as US arms manufacturers play catchup to the huge demand created by the war against Russia.

The shortage means the Biden administration still has \$6 billion in funds available to arm and equip Ukraine, but the Pentagon lacks the inventory it is willing to deliver more than two years into the war, two US officials told CNN.

—Natasha Bertrand & Oren Liebermann, FROM CNN
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

Putin orders Russian army to become second largest after China's

President Vladimir Putin on Monday ordered the regular size of the Russian army to be increased by 180,000 troops to 1.5 million active servicemen in a move that would make it the second largest in the world after China's. In a decree published on the Kremlin's website, Putin ordered the overall size of the armed forces to be increased to 2.38 million people, of which he said 1.5 million should be active servicemen.

According to data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), a leading military think tank, such an increase would see Russia leapfrog the United States and India in terms of the number of active combat soldiers it has at its disposal and be second only to China in size.

—Andrew Osborn, FROM REUTERS
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 16, 2024

U.N. sees 'human rights abyss' in Myanmar as military kills civilians

Thousands of civilians in Myanmar have been "killed at the hands of the military," the United Nations said on Tuesday, including hundreds who have died from torture and neglect in the junta's prisons.

"Myanmar is plunging the depths of a human rights abyss," James Rodehaver, the head of the U.N. human rights team monitoring the crisis, told journalists. He described a vacuum in the rule of law that was being filled by summary killings, torture and sexual violence.

The casualties attest to a chaotic civil war that escalated sharply after the military staged a coup in February 2021. Now, three years later, pro-democracy forces and ethnic militias are battling the junta's soldiers in a conflict that has displaced more than three million people and left close to 19 million in need of humanitarian aid, according to the U.N.

—Nick Cumming-Bruce, FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

Floods wreak havoc across four continents, killing thousands

Chad. Vietnam. Austria. The American South.

In very disparate regions of the world, extreme rainfall in recent weeks has killed thousands of people, submerged entire towns, set off landslides and left millions without power. It's a harbinger of the wild weather events that are a hallmark of climate change, driven by the burning of fossil fuels, and it is highlighting the need to urgently adapt, in rich and poor countries alike.

Bursts of extreme rainfall are making both coastal and riverine flooding more dangerous and unpredictable.

"Extreme events are getting stronger everywhere, so we should expect floods to be bigger regardless of where we are," said Michael Wehner, a scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

—Austyn Gaffney & Somini Sengupta, FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

AN ELLIE FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

I Saw a Stranger on the Street Today.

Dear stranger, did you ever really mean the world to me?

By Ellie Montemayor
PUBLISHER

Content Warning: *This piece contains mentions of substance use and explicit descriptions of mental illness.*

I saw a stranger on the street today. I was walking down the street with a friend, and she was headed the other way. We turned to look at each other as we walked by, and we gave blank, empty glances—just as one would when side-eyeing peculiar strangers. I walked right past her like she was no one to me, because she was.

You looked different from when I last saw you. Your hair—is it dirty blonde, or more of a reddish tone? I didn’t get a good look. It’s curled, now, too; I like it a lot. It’s different from the pixie-cut faded green you sported six months ago.

I looked different, too. My hair—almost the same, but cut well. Pinker and sharper, too: I had it re-dyed over the summer.

You still wear the same flannels. I like them; they’re quite colorful. My outfits are a bit different from what I wore last time we met. New semester, new Ellie. I wonder how much of you is the same, and how much of you is new? (How different is the real you, here and now, from the version of you I still hold in my heart?)

Do you still have that plastic rose I gave you back in April? (Or did you throw it away?) Do you still listen to the same songs we listened to together? (Or did you scrub them from your playlists already?) We both turned around for a second. And we both kept walking.

I thought about going up to her—talking to her, asking if I could get to know her all over again—then I threw that thought away.

I called a stranger on the phone today. I asked her how my brother was doing—was he well?

What have you been doing lately? (Anything exciting; anything new?)

Just taking care of home, as always, she said. (Sometimes—most times—it feels like preserving that idea of “home” mattered to you more than I did.)

We talked pleasantries. We talked about the usual stuff: how school was going, whatever exciting thing I had planned for the week, when I would come home again. (Never.)

Sometimes that’s the last thing we talk about before I hang up, bitter and frustrated. Maybe she’ll understand one day. (She probably says the same thing about me.) The calls, though infrequent, are pleasant. At times I miss her, the stranger on the phone.

I said *bye* to her. And I hung up. I thought about going back home—making amends, rebuilding my past—then I threw that thought away.

I said *happy birthday* to a stranger today.

I remember when we were kids. He was my best friend; my aide-de-camp. Sometimes, I wish he still was.

We first met when I noticed the jade-green novel you had on your desk in class. (Angie Sage’s “Flyte.” I loved the first book; you lent the sequel for me to read. We talked about Septimus Heap every recess for the rest of that week.)

I loved talking about stories with you; talking about writing stories with you; regaling one another with the fantasy worlds we would make up for each other all to get

out of dealing with our real lives in the real world. It was easier that way. I still recall that one afternoon we spent on the bed of your dad’s pickup truck. We wrote stories outside, laughing, having fun, until it turned dark.

I wish I hadn’t thrown away the board game we designed together. It was made of cardboard, and it wasn’t really that fun to play, but it was a memory I will never get back.

Over the next two years, as our group of misfits grew and grew, we slowly drifted apart. I wish we stayed in touch, and I wish you were still my best friend.

He’s different now, and so am I. It’s startling to see how much time has passed, and how much has changed. (It feels like just yesterday when our teachers said we were basically twins, even though your skin was white and mine was brown.)

We still text sometimes, but we don’t really get far into conversation. We don’t know what to say to each other anymore, I think. We’re different now.

I thought about sending him another text—giving him a call, telling him about the kinds of stories I write now—then I threw that thought away.

I said *goodbye* to a stranger today.

I didn’t say it before. I wish I did. It’s been two years now, and I never will get to. (Four years, actually. I can’t believe it’s been so long.)

I was thinking about the scars on my hand, and then I thought about hers.

I thought about her lying in that bathtub; how alone she must have felt; how scared she must have been; how hard she must have gripped the knife in her hand; how much she must have been hurting.

I don’t know how to honor her memory. I didn’t even know her anymore. She was one of my closest friends as a kid, the stranger that exists now only in memory. But I still remember the times we hung out at the park and the playground and the many places that headlined our quaint little California town.

Do you remember when we were kids, and we called you Ms. Secret Service Agent? You were quiet, formidable—quite terrifying to behold, actually. (But there was a sweet side to you that I loved, and I know everyone else did too.) You always wore these black aviators and loved playing along to your would-be profession.

She hated my guts when we first met, and I hated hers, too. She was unsufferable to me, as I was to her. But in the end, she was the one who sat next to me when we and our friends huddled in the space under the playground together.

(I’m not the center of this story, just one of the many people left behind.) (I hope you’re in a better place now.) (I will believe you are.) (I know you are.) (You are.)

I told her best friend (a fellow survivor of our would-be band of brothers) *I’m sorry this happened* when it happened, one of the many dozens of people who must have sent that same exact message. Then I moved on with my life.

I thought about lighting a candle for her—saying hi to her best friend, doing anything I could to lie to myself that she went to sleep, for the last time, in peace—then I threw that thought away.

I said *I love you* to a stranger today.

I didn’t say it to her face. I wonder if, on the other side of it all—the way on the other side of a broken city over-

flew with broken hearts and broken dreams—she says it to me, too.

She stumbled back into my life just as I gave up on the idea. You don’t know how much that meant to me; how much you giving me the time of day, whatever that looks like, means to me.

That lovely little blue-haired girl that always made my day, oh what I would give to see you smile again. (I hear your laughs, in my head, when we crack jokes together. I see the life in your eyes, in my head, when we talk about all your favorite things.)

We text sometimes, once every couple of days, I and the stranger who used to mean everything to me. We talk about H.P. Lovecraft, and we talk about the dark and macabre corners of a world that paints over its ugly parts, and we talk about the philosophy of life. We talk about the people we used to be, and we talk about the people we are now. (You’re still the same person you used to be, even if you’re different now.)

Each time we talk, I try to piece together, glue back together, the story that we used to share. I hope you’re doing it with me, too.

But I don’t know what I am to you, anymore. That’s okay, I think. That’s okay with me.

We’re getting to know each other all over again. It’s nice, even if it’s different now. Whether I will ever mean everything to you again, whether I will ever get to hold your hand again—you will always make my day. (That’s what matters most to me, really.)

I thought about telling her how I really felt—telling her that I wanted to be everything to her all over again, telling her that I would cross that broken city that separates us just to see her again—then I threw that thought away.

The strangers I don’t know anymore, they still take up space in the story of me. Somewhere in there, the little things that made us click in the first place are the glue that keeps me together.

I don’t see them in me, anymore, nor me in them. Their own stories, their own lives; they all exist to me now—the people they were, the people I knew, the people I want them to be—only in memory. I used to hold parts of them close to me, letting my trajectory across the vastness of the cosmos shift around them as the orbits of their story pull against me in my passing. But now, I can barely remember what it’s like to be the kind of person that fits into their lives, nice and neat, as a puzzle piece would. (Eventually, my orbit with another always drifts apart; I continue on, and they do, too. We hurtle through space away from one another as though we had never met in the first place, the strangers I don’t know anymore.)

At times, I’m overcome with the burning desire to pull their orbit back to me. I want to be the kind of person that fits into their lives again; when I’m crying in the corner of my room, and the best I can do is kick and scream, and the world feels all too big for me, I long to be next to the strangers that could have been my entire world. But there’s a reason we’re strangers, now. A reason that when I look into their eyes, I don’t see anything but distance. A reason why our orbits drifted apart.

We just don’t fit together, nice and neat, anymore. (Maybe we never did.)

Dear stranger, did you ever really

mean the world to me? Or were you just another apparition in my life, just another frequency I tuned into on life’s staticky radio to keep the cold and uncaring void from consuming me? The frequency of each stranger that could have been my entire world always goes dark. And no matter how hard I look, I will never find it again. (See: *Radio Silence*, another column from “An Ellie For Your Thoughts.”)

I saw a stranger in the mirror today. I looked at her, but she didn’t look back.

Well, in the most shallow way, she did—she stared at my eyes, her echoing gaze fixed to the shifting of mine, as I stared at hers. Try as I might, I couldn’t find the light in her eyes that used to make my day.

Who are you to me, oh stranger in the mirror? I see you every day when I wake up, and I see you every day when I go to sleep. (I see you in the reflection of the puddle that forms on the street after a rainy day, in the reflection of all the windows as I pass by nameless buildings on my way to campus, in the reflection of my laptop as I write this column.)

I used to know who you are. I used to know what you liked, and what you hated, and what made you tick.

I used to know why you did the things you did.

I used to know everything about you.

But you’re different now. (Why are you different now? Why did you never tell me what went wrong and changed me so much from the person I used to know?) You’re different from that hopeful little girl who stepped foot on campus for the first time, ready for a new beginning. You’re different from that bright-eyed little girl who wanted to take the world by storm. You’re different from that happy little girl who just needed a friend.

She stared back at me as I watched her in the mirror, and I don’t know who she is anymore. And it scares me. It scares me so much that I might never be able to get to know her ever again.

I want to get to know her again—I really, really want to. But where do I even start? How do I get to know a stranger who doesn’t even know herself?

I told her, *I love you*; I told her, *I understand you*. She said it back as I spoke the words aloud—but cold, empty, hollow.

I thought about trying to understand why she’s different now—sitting her down and making her tell me all of the things that went wrong; trying to rekindle that light in her eyes that used to make my day—then I threw that thought away.

The strangers I don’t know anymore, I want to get to know them all over again. I want to look at them, and I want them to look at me, with love and life and light. I want us to cross paths once more and let our orbits pull us in the direction of one another. I want them to mean everything to me—I want to mean everything to them—all over again.

Maybe they will, and maybe I will, if I tried hard enough; if we tried hard enough. Maybe we might have made it happen; maybe, in some far off distant future when all the stars have burned to dust and all that’s left is the cold and dark embrace of the forever, we might have found a way.

But I throw all the thoughts and *what ifs* away.

All because I saw a stranger on the street today.

VIVIAN'S REFLECTIONS

MIT’s Excellent Sheep

how three years of college changed me

By Vivian Hir
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

One strange thought I had during orientation week this year was how old I felt compared to the freshmen. Although I was a junior last year, the idea of being old didn’t cross my mind because there were seniors who were older than me: they were applying for graduate schools and full-time jobs. At that time, I avoided thinking too much about my future.

After three full years at MIT, the difference between me, a senior, and the freshmen is stark. Seeing them come to campus with the excitement and energy that I once had was both heartening and disheartening. Heartening because they reminded me of how much I looked forward to attending MIT, disheartening because I am now less idealistic about college. The word “old” sounds wrong because I am only 21, but I genuinely feel old.

At least relative to the other undergraduates here. The reasons that many students end up working in industries like big tech or quant are not surprising—the salaries are high and the benefits are superb. It is important to mention other motivations for financial security, such as the desire to help their family financially or the pressure of making an expensive education a worthy investment.

Despite this, part of me feels somewhat sad to see some students who enter MIT excited about doing research in areas like the life sciences switch to Course 6 because of the money and practicality. I know a decent fraction of students who came to MIT with the goal of becoming a doctor or researcher, but ultimately gave up on that dream because of how hard and uncertain this path is, which I relate to and understand.

Before I came to MIT, I had the impression that MIT was one of the best places in the world for scientific and technical research: a powerhouse for generating meaningful research, a place for pursuing higher knowledge. That aspect of MIT hasn’t changed, but it doesn’t paint a complete picture.

Consider the MIT News website, for instance. The front page features many articles that display MIT in a positive light, from groundbreaking research across various fields to profiles of people who are passionate about using science and technology to advance society. There is no denying that innovation, powered by the many inspirational people on campus, happens here. The reality, however, is that a lot of students end up working in technology, quantitative trading, or management consulting after graduating.

I know that this is an oversimplification of MIT employment outcomes. Nonetheless, it seems mostly true, at least based on the conversations I’ve had with upperclassmen and friends about careers. Of course, there are some students who go to graduate school for a PhD, but that

isn’t the most popular of paths. Devoting six years to research on a low stipend requires a serious commitment.

Instead, many students get a job after getting their bachelor’s degree or MEng. According to the 2023 MIT Graduating Student Survey, 49% of surveyed students chose employment after graduation. Among those who chose employment, the top three categories were: information/computer technology (32%), finance and insurance (18%), and professional services such as consulting (13%). 43% chose graduate school. Out of those who stated that they would do graduate school, 58% said masters, 35% said doctoral, and 7% said medical degrees.

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Even I did this, switching from Course 5-7 to Course 6-7. Of course, there are many other reasons for changing fields, like having new interests or not enjoying the work as much as initially expected.

Furthermore, the path to becoming a software engineer or quantitative trader is more straightforward and the results are more instant: fellowship opportunities come out in freshman year, internship recruitment starts sophomore year, and you get a high-paying job after a junior year internship. The job not only guarantees a comfortable life after graduation, but also serves as a marker for success. In high school, the goalpost was getting into top colleges. In college, the new goalpost for many is securing a prestigious internship or job.

This large fraction of

students who graduate to work for the corporate world somehow feels at odds with MIT’s mission and purpose. The “About MIT” section of MIT’s website includes the following mission statement: “advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century.”

Let me unpack that sentence. There is no doubt that MIT provides students with a strong education through its rigorous classes, well-established research programs, and abundant academic opportunities. I also acknowledge that MIT as an institution is not responsible for directly causing this discrepancy between intention and results.

My issue with the statement is that a lot of MIT’s undergraduate culture centers on securing a prestigious internship or job, with frequent discussion of wanting to make a lot of money. Combined, this overall sentiment deviates from a mission statement focused on using research and education for the betterment of society. Even if the company you work for may not have a direct positive impact on society, there’s always the option of donating a portion of your high income to a charity that does good for the world... right?

This misalignment is also present when one considers the MIT for a Better World fundraising campaign, which focused on solving the world’s most pressing future problems such as climate change and medicine. These goals are wonderful and crucial, but they do not reflect the work that many students do after graduation. These realizations, over time, have led to my growing disillusionment of MIT.

In an environment where corporate sponsored events and company merchandise are all over the place, I wonder what the actual purpose of an MIT education is: applying one’s knowledge to make new discoveries, or using this education as a stepping stone for future career success? It’s apparent that the official answer is the former, but the common answer is the latter.

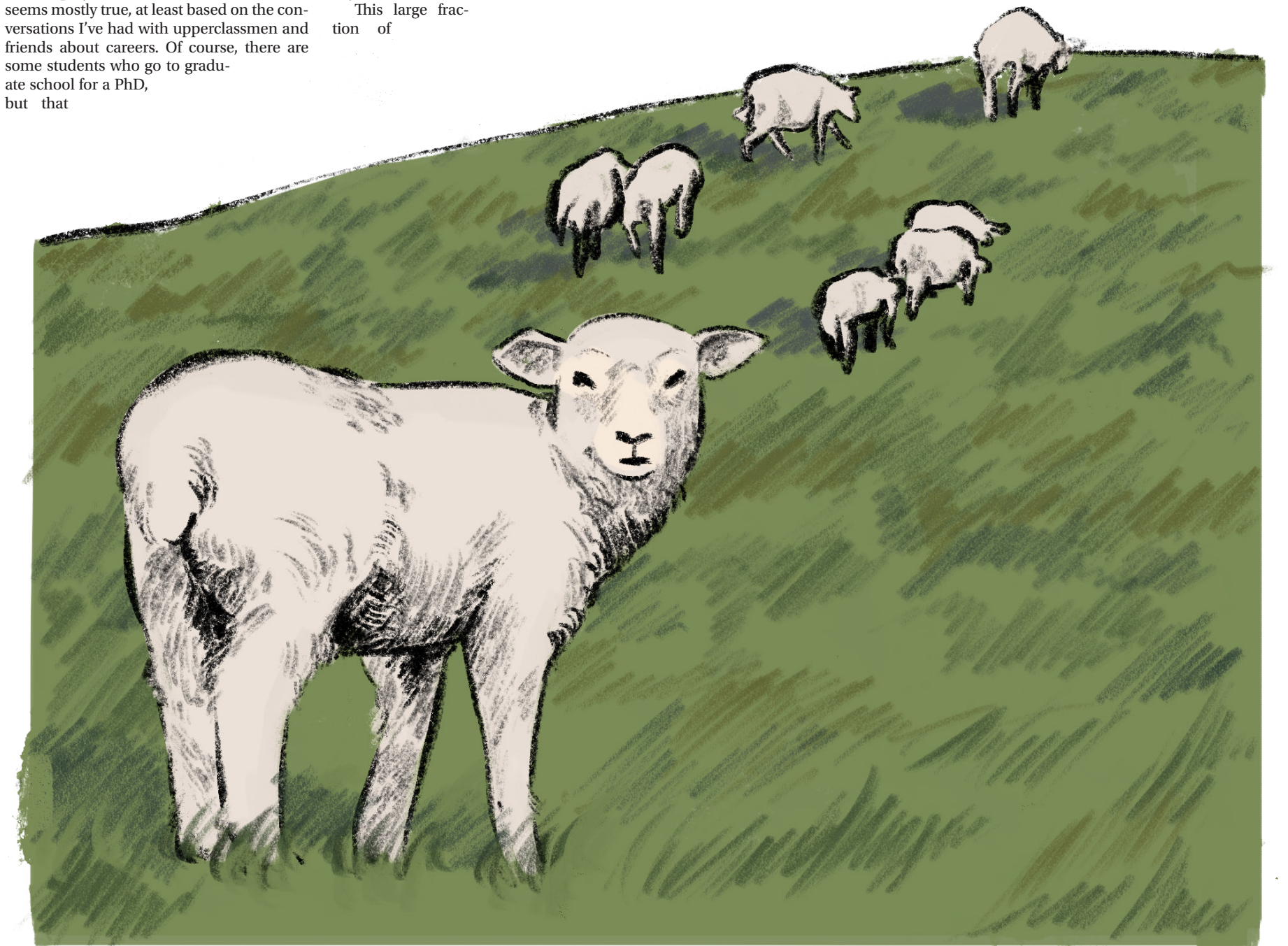
It would be incomplete without men-

tioning that I contribute to this culture of streamlined careers, given that I considered consulting this past summer. After failing my case interview at a consulting firm, however, I started having mixed feelings about the purpose of consulting. Now that I have returned to my research project and thought more about the Course 6-7 MEng, I am vaguely thinking about graduate school. My thoughts about my future career paths are fickle, but I find it reassuring that I am considering a PhD again. I am not sure how long these thoughts will last, but I see this as a good sign.

Despite the renewed hope I have about my future options, the cognitive dissonance I experience around how I perceive MIT persists. MIT is a place rich in scientific discovery and passionate people. However, MIT is also a place where I see a lot of conformity in the student body, from Course 6 making up nearly half of declared undergrad majors to the homogenization of career choices.

I am not saying everyone in the tech industry does the same kind of work, as there are tech companies that focus on healthcare or sustainability. Similarly, not everyone in Course 6 is in Course 6 solely because of the money or extrinsic reasons. I know many people who enjoy coding and love learning about the vast field of computer science.

I am also not saying that pursuing graduate school for higher knowledge or becoming a doctor makes someone inherently better than someone who works for a tech company or trading firm. What I am concerned about is this general pattern of people who came to MIT wanting to do x, but ended up switching to Course 6. As my friend once joked, “All roads lead to Course 6.” When indirect social pressures and groupthink behavior come together as a whole, I can’t help but see ourselves as a herd of excellent sheep.

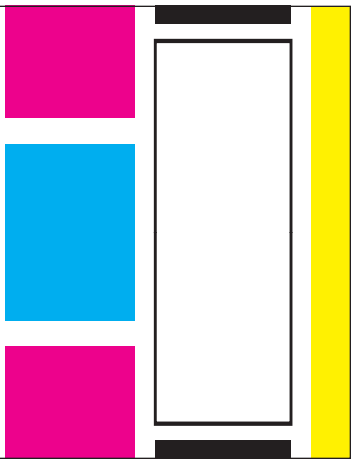


EMILY PAN • THE TECH



Do you think YOU can fit the page better than we did?

Join Production, Get Paid, Eat Dinner!



Summer Break



PHOTO COURTESY OF GOZEL DOVRANOVA '26

"I spent my summer doing a research exchange at Imperial College London!"



PHOTO COURTESY OF DIVYA '28

"At camp!"



OMAR OROZCO - THE TECH

Omar Orozco '25, Donavon Clay '25, Uriel Magana-Salgado '21, Daniel Gonzalez-Diaz '21, and Vanessa Rutherford '01 meet up to support the HSF and MIT Class of 2027 at the National Leadership Conference in Los Angeles, California.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EVIE ZHANG '28

"A 'floating temple' built into cliff wall in Shanxi, China"



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEX ZHAO '28

"The boys at nathan's hot dog contest"



PHOTO COURTESY OF NNAMDI OBI '25

"Under the Bay Bridge"



PHOTO COURTESY OF ATHARVA SHAH '28

"Bananas in India!"



PHOTO COURTESY OF HASAN ZEKI YILDIZ '25

"A couple MIT students exploring Alcatraz. It's not as impermeable as it used to be."



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOLDEN '25

"Boston sunset!"



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMEE SAVJANI '25

"Varenna, Lake Como, Italy"



2024-2025
MIND AND HAND BOOK

The Mind and Hand Book is the official guide to MIT's expectations of all undergraduate and graduate students, including the policies on academic integrity, alcohol, drugs, hazing, and sexual misconduct.



handbook.mit.edu



Capture the Moment

Join Photo at The Tech
join@tech.mit.edu



101 THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU GRADUATE

32. Take a stroll through Little Italy in the North End

Join the Arts department at The Tech and write restaurant reviews.
(And get reimbursed for your meal!)

MOVIE REVIEW

A larger-than-life action thriller with a powerful message

'Saripodha Sanivaram' is an entertaining film further elevated by intense background score

★★★★☆

Saripodha Sanivaram

Directed by Vivek Athreya

Screenplay by Vivek Athreya

Starring Nani, S. J. Suryah, Priyanka Mohan, Abhirami

Rated U/A, Now Playing

By Vyshnavi Vennelakanti
STAFF WRITER

Saripodha Sanivaram is a vigilante action thriller that revolves around the lives of the protagonist Surya (Nani), the antagonist Daya (S. J. Suryah), and the people from the fictional village of Sokulapalem. It opens with Surya, who has fallen to the ground after being attacked. We are then taken on the journey that has led to his current state. As a child, Surya had trouble controlling his anger and exploded at everything that annoyed him. His mother (Abhirami) makes him understand that his temper is powerful, but if expressed frequently, it would lose its value. To help control his fury, she lets him pick one day in a week to lash out, the catch being that he must remain calm during the remaining days of the week. Follow-

ing a series of events, Surya chooses Saturday to unleash his wrath, and he only fights people he has justified anger against. This brings us to the title of the film, Saripodha Sanivaram, which translates to "Is Saturday not enough?"

In a parallel manner, we are introduced to the antagonist, Daya (S. J. Suryah), who also has trouble controlling his anger. He is a police officer entangled in a property dispute with his politician brother. While Daya's anger is justified, he cannot take it out on his brother, who is in a more powerful position. Instead, Daya uses the innocent people of Sokulapalem as a punching bag. The conflict in the story arises when Surya learns about Daya's atrocities from Charu (Priyanka Mohan), a police officer working under Daya. The rest of the story is about how Surya, with the help of Charu, takes down Daya to help the people of Sokulapalem.

The characterizations of Surya and Daya are in sharp contrast despite their sharing similar anger issues. While Surya channels his rage thoughtfully and constructively, Daya intentionally directs it towards innocents. Contrary to the trope in most action thrillers where the antagonist is needlessly evil, Daya plays a crucial role in shaping the development of Surya in Saripodha Sanivaram.

Throughout the film, we see Surya's unchecked fury become a force for positive change in his community. This is a refreshing arc to watch, as opposed to a protagonist with a savior complex who single-handedly beats up the antagonist and solves everyone's problems. Saripodha Sanivaram sends home a powerful message: no one will fight your battles for you; you have to fight them yourself!

Despite a straightforward and sometimes predictable storyline, it is the screenplay and writing that make the movie stand out. The writer-director, Vivek Athreya, employs a non-linear screenplay for Saripodha Sanivaram, something he has experimented with in his previous movies, Brochevaravara and Ante Sundaraniki. This narrative adds suspense, keeping the audience hooked with anticipation. For example, at the intermission block, Athreya uses a slightly extended version of the opening scene which reveals the ultimate face-off between Surya and Daya, but this time, we realize that this scene marks the pre-climax of the film. The beauty of his screenplay is such that although he uses the same scene in the beginning, intermission, and pre-climax of the film, we have new information about the story every time we see it. This keeps us guessing about what led to a particular scene and how it will finally unravel at the end.

Athreya is not only excellent at developing a gripping screenplay, but he is also a mastermind who effortlessly weaves comedy into tense situations. Sequences where Daya vents his frustration while plotting against his brother or beating up innocent people are often written such that a comedic effect is generated naturally even in these terrifying episodes. Athreya also skillfully stages scenes with seemingly unimportant characters to deliver astonishing payoffs when we least expect it!

Even in an action thriller, Athreya tells a beautiful story laced with thought-provoking undertones. For example, when Surya's mother teaches her daughter how to cook, she tells her that cooking is just like any other subject she has to learn, and learning how to cook does not mean that she must

restrict herself to the kitchen. In a society where gender roles are still prevalent, this kind of storytelling in commercial entertainment creates a positive impact.

If Athreya's writing is the foundation of the film, it is the actors who bring his vision to life. Two performers stand out in particular: Nani and S. J. Suryah. Nani, who plays Surya, takes us on a journey of realizing the meaning of true anger and when it is justified.

We empathize with and root for him through his character development. In addition, it would be an understatement to say that Suryah breathes life into Daya. Suryah has a commanding screen presence with unique mannerisms and dialog delivery. No other actor could have pulled this role off with such perfection, especially in sequences where Suryah seamlessly transitions between Daya's conflicting emotions. If my love for Athreya's previous films made me watch Saripodha Sanivaram in cinemas, it was Suryah's dynamic and expressive acting that took me to the cinemas for a second time.

While Surya and Daya are the two most important characters, the soundtrack by James Bejoy is undoubtedly another essential part of the film. Though the music occasionally overpowers some of the dialogue, Bejoy's work perfectly complements the tone of the film and keeps the viewer emotionally invested. In particular, the ominous background score that marks Daya's presence on screen makes his presence even more terrifying.

Overall, Saripodha Sanivaram is an out-and-out action film that tells the tale of two furious men who lock horns in a battle of rages. It is sure to get your heart racing and adrenaline pumping.

THREE QUESTIONS

Growing to greatness: Professor Mary Gehring on plant epigenetics and becoming an HHMI Investigator

From the intricacies of plant reproduction to genome-wide analyses, Gehring's lab delves deep into the epigenetic mechanisms shaping plant biology.

By Jayashabari Shankar
NEWS EDITOR

Dr. Mary Gehring is a professor of biology at MIT and a core member of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research. Her research focuses on how epigenetic mechanisms like DNA methylation influence gene regulation during plant reproduction and seed development in the model organism Arabidopsis thaliana. In the classroom, she teaches genetics (7.03), a required course for biology and biological engineering majors.

With her recent appointment as an Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) investigator, Gehring joins an elite legion of HHMI investigators at the Institute. New cohorts of investigators are announced once every three years, and they receive \$11 million in funding over a seven year term (which can be renewed). Three other MIT faculty received HHMI appointments this year: Gene-Wei Li, associate professor of biology, and brain and cognitive sciences professors Mehrdad Jazayeri and Steven Flavell.

Here, she shares her lab's research, journey into plant biology, and what she values in undergraduate researchers.

TT: What does your lab conduct research in, and how has being named an HHMI investigator changed your plans, if at all?

My lab focuses on plant biology, particularly on how epigenetic mechanisms like DNA methylation affect gene regulation in plants, especially during re-

production and seed development. We mostly work with Arabidopsis thaliana, a model plant, but we're also exploring other plant systems.

A typical day in the lab can vary, but it often starts with checking on our plants in the greenhouse. Depending on the day, we might pollinate plants for genetic crosses or genotyping them by isolating DNA and performing PCR. We're particularly focused on understanding gene expression within seeds: we isolate different seed tissues, sort nuclei based on their properties, and then perform RNA sequencing. We also do a lot of chromatin profiling, histone modifications and DNA methylation analyses across the genome. Since much of our work is genome-wide, bioinformatics plays a big role in our research, with a significant amount of time spent on analyzing data.

It's still sinking in, but being named an HHMI investigator certainly provides a new level of freedom. It allows us to pursue ideas without the constraints of specific grant funding, which is incredibly liberating. We're considering expanding our research into new areas beyond epigenetics, like genome structure and chromosome dosage changes, while sticking with plant biology. This recognition has encouraged us to think bigger and explore new directions in our work.

TT: How far back do these interests extend for you?

My interest in plant biology started during my undergraduate years. I majored in biology and was eager to get in-

involved in research. My real fascination with plants began when a new professor, with a background in plant biology, came to my school. I took her course on plant growth and development, which I found incredibly exciting. I was drawn to how plants communicate within their tissues and with each other. This led me to work on a research project for two years, culminating in a senior thesis on root development. After college, I took a year off to work in environmental consulting before heading to graduate school in Plant Biology at UC Berkeley.

TT: What perspectives and characteristics do you appreciate in undergraduate researchers?

Whether it's undergraduates or post-docs, I value curiosity and dedication. For undergraduates, especially those in UROPs, it's crucial that they are genuinely interested in the research and willing to ask questions when they don't understand something. Balancing research with coursework and extracurriculars at MIT is challenging, so I also look for students who can manage their time well. It's about being curious, dedicated, and communicative.

I hope there are students at MIT who are excited about plant research. It's a vital area of biology, especially with the growing focus on climate change. While there isn't a large presence of plant biology at MIT yet, I'm hopeful that it will expand in the coming years, and I'd love to see more students getting involved in this important field.



Students present a project at HackMIT, September 15, 2024.



Students present a project at HackMIT, September 15, 2024.

WANT YOUR CLUB SPORT IN THE TECH?

WANTED

sports·writ·er(s)
/ 'spɔ:ts, rɪdərs/
noun



noun: sports writers
journalists who write about sports.

No prior experience needed! Just an interest in sports. And probably writing.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Tech must do better

The Tech broke its own policy; it misled its readers; it failed to ascertain a basic fact; and it omitted important details.

By Will Sussman

Editor-in-Chief's Note: *The Tech publishes once every two weeks; henceforth, the correction that is mentioned below was made promptly for the subsequent issue after its initial publication. Furthermore, The Tech strictly abides to all standards of journalistic integrity.*

The Tech has made a series of editorial mistakes in its coverage of the Graduate Student Union (GSU). It broke its own policy; it misled its readers; it failed to ascertain a basic fact; and it omitted important details.

The Tech's opinion policy states, "Letters, columns, and cartoons must bear the authors' signatures, addresses, and phone numbers. Unsigned letters will not be accepted." Yet on April 11, The Tech published an opinion piece, "A statement on Jewish activism, safety, and recent events at MIT," attributed only to "MIT Jews For Ceasefire."

Among other problems, the piece attacks me and four other Jewish students for accepting free legal aid in filing federal discrimination charges against the GSU, aid which proved instrumental in our victory. The piece was technically signed, but because the authors lacked the courage to sign their names, we do not know who is responsible for smearing us; perhaps they work for the GSU. The Tech should not accept pieces by faceless, unaccountable organizations.

Then, on April 25, The Tech published a news article, "Graduate Student Union passes referendum on ceasefire in Palestine," which states that "942 graduate students out of 7,344 voted in this election, with 70.5 percent voting in favor of 38 abstentions." This is extremely misleading. There were 3,362 eligible voters, with 980 casting ballots, 38 of whom cast "abstain"; but 2,382 eligible voters did not cast ballots at all, for a total of 2,420 abstentions. No matter how one slices it, less

than 20% of eligible voters were in favor of a resolution that did not mention "peace," "hostages," or "Hamas."

Next, on May 30, The Tech posted a photo, erroneously captioned "A pro-Palestinian rally organized by the Graduate Student Union." It took until June 14 for The Tech to issue a correction: "this rally was actually organized by the Boston Coalition For Palestine." For two whole weeks, The Tech never questioned why the GSU would organize a pro-Palestinian rally. In fairness, it's hard to tell the difference between the GSU and the Boston Coalition for Palestine.

(Note from the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief: *The Tech publishes once every two weeks; henceforth, the mentioned correction was made for the following issue. Additionally, although the GSU did not organize the May 15 protest the photo refers to, they did host a protest march that concluded in front of Building E1 five days prior on May 10.)*

Finally, on August 1, The Tech published a news article, "Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu '75 SM '76 slams alma mater in congressional speech as Washington erupts in protest." The article quotes and pictures a GSU area chief steward at the July riot, but describes him only as "an organizer with the MIT Coalition For Palestine." He was joined by the GSU vice president and at least one other area chief steward, but they were omitted from the article entirely. Earlier that month, I testified before Congress about these GSU agents, but this too was deemed unfit to print. (National Review and Inside Higher Ed felt otherwise.)

As The Tech's editorial board acknowledged, "the developments of this year have shown us that there remains work to be done." The Tech must do better in its coverage of the GSU.

Signed,
Will Sussman

GUEST COLUMN

Rebuttal of Anti-Israel Claims (Part 2)

A follow-up treatise on an article series that delves into the nature of the claims and positions made by pro-Palestinian protestors at MIT and addresses underlying questions war and country.

By Steve Cohen

This is a continuation of my rebuttal of anti-Israel claims from a previous issue of The Tech.

First, I will note that as of 10 days after publication of that column, not a single anti-Israel writer or protester has responded. The MIT Values Statement says “Because learning is nourished by a diversity of views, we cherish free expression, debate, and dialogue in pursuit of truth – and we commit to using these tools with respect for each other and our community.” I am engaging in debate and dialogue, but it appears I do not have a counterpart in this endeavor.

A common anti-Israel claim is that Israel was founded as a colonialist nation. As with genocide, that word is never defined by those using it. A common definition of a colony is “an area over which a foreign nation or state extends or maintains control” [1]. The argument seems to be that Jews coming from Europe took over Palestine, and therefore were colonists. But the various Jews who immigrated to Palestine from the late 19th century to the early 20th century were not sent by any foreign nation or state. They were mainly refugees from Eastern Europe, escaping discrimination and countless separate pogroms. They came from many different locations, bought land (much of it desert or swamp), developed it, and lobbied the controlling powers to be a state, in the same way Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and many other countries in the region became states. Later waves of immigration resulted, not from a desire to take control, but because every other country had strict quotas preventing Jews from immigrating, from 1920 all the way up to 1948. Even the British severely limited immigration to Palestine by Jews during that period. The Jews had nowhere else to go. That is not colonization; that is escape.

Additionally, close to 45% of Jews in Israel are Mizrahi, which are Jews who emigrated from or are descended from those originating in Middle Eastern or North African countries [2]. Many of those Jews were violently expelled from Arab countries when Israel declared independence or left when

it became clear that they would not be safe in those countries. So Israelis are not colonizers — the vast majority of Israelis are descendants of refugees.

No foreign nation sent Jews to colonize for purposes of control, so the foundation of the state of Israel does not meet the definition of colonization.

The term “apartheid” is also misused, and never defined by the anti-Israel writers and protesters. A legal definition is “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them” [3]. As mentioned previously, millions of Palestinians living in Israel are citizens, voters, members of the military, leaders of large companies, or members of Parliament. The Palestinians in Israel are racially and ethnically identical to those outside Israel. Does that fit within the definition of apartheid? Inside the West Bank, Palestinians are not treated like Israeli citizens, because they are not Israeli citizens, nor do they reside in Israeli territory. One can debate how an occupying power should treat residents of occupied territory, but treating often-hostile Palestinian civilians in occupied territory differently than law-abiding Israeli citizens in Israel proper is by no means apartheid. **(Executive Committee Note: The Tech could not immediately identify a source that objectively clarifies the claims substantiated above.)** It is a differentiation based on location and political status, not race or ethnicity, and therefore does not meet the definition of apartheid.

Finally, I will talk about the concept of Zionism. I think it is unjust for opponents to define what a group’s goals and purposes are. Zionism is defined by many Zionists as “the movement for the self-determination and statehood for the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland, the land of Israel.”

The Declaration of Israel’s Independence says:

“[The] recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their State is irrevocable.

This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other na-

tions, in their own sovereign State...

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations” [4].

That is Zionism. A small number of people will violate the terms of Zionism and still call it Zionism. Anyone who is interested in dialogue and progress will recognize that misusing that term creates conflict and mistrust, and will avoid using it in a derogatory way. Because very often, anti-Zionism is just a codeword for anti-Semitism. Fair and respectful criticism of Israel—or more specifically the Israeli government—should always be acceptable, when it is in proportion to criticism of other governments in similar situations. But dog-whistles, stereotypes and blanket statements are never acceptable.

Some closing observations: I have said many times that every death in Gaza is a tragedy. Continuing the fighting is the second worst option, given that Hamas has created an environment intended to maximize civilian casualties. **(Executive Committee Note: Western media have reported that Hamas, at times, have deliberately put civilians in danger amidst combat in residential areas. It is not immediately clear that such acts are intended to maximize non-combatant casualties.)** But the worst option is letting Hamas remain in power. They will rearm, they will rebuild tunnels instead of rebuilding schools, and Palestinians will suffer under the rule of a barbaric terrorist organization. As soon as they are able, Hamas will repeat October 7, as promised, and we will be right back where we started, with even more death and destruction on all sides [5]. **(Executive Committee Note: Given the underground nature of the militant organization, it is imme-**

diately unclear that—although Hamas spokespeople have at times claimed the group’s desire to continue these attacks should the war persist—these will actually be carried nor would they be to the scale of October 7. Notably, interviews held with Hamas spokespeople by Western versus Middle Eastern media yielded conflicting responses to such questions.)

The best thing for the Palestinian people is the end of Hamas as the government of Gaza, and the start of a new chapter. Hamas can make that happen today, but they refuse. If someone knows how that goal can be achieved more peacefully than how Israel is attempting to achieve it, please let me know.

In the thousands and thousands of words written by the authors mentioned in my previous column, not a single word was written about Hamas’s responsibility for any deaths, other than a brief false equivalence of October 7 to the occupation of Gaza. The entirety of the casualties, in which tens of thousands of Hamas fighters are lumped in with civilians, is blamed on Israel. In all those columns, no mention is made of the continued holding of hostages, the rockets firing at Israeli civilians with no military objective, the Gazans killed by badly aimed Hamas rockets and Hamas gunfire. Not a word is said about the ability of Hamas to stop the war if they would only release the hostages and surrender. I think that silence, as well as their refusal to engage in a discussion, speaks volumes.

[1] <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colony>
[2] <https://people.socsci.tau.ac.il/mu/noah/files/2018/07/Ethnic-origin-and-identity-in-Israel-JEMS-2018.pdf>
[3] https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.10_International%20Convention%20on%20the%20Suppression%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Apartheid.pdf
[4] https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/israel.asp
[5] <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/13/us/politics/hamas-power-gaza-violence-israel.html>

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Some Notes on Recent Protests at MIT: An Analysis of Campus Free Speech and Justice

An ethics-first discussion on the morality of war, history of protest at MIT, and sustainable sources of justice

By Kyle Williams

Publisher’s Note: The following article was originally written as part of a final project for the class 24.134 (Experiential Ethics). That piece was revised for publication.

Introduction

Students and faculty have demanded since the fall of the 2023-24 school year that MIT end its defense research relationship with Israel’s Ministry of Defense (MoD). This is because of the war the nation is conducting in the Middle East against Hamas, which has resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent people on the Gaza strip.

Despite calls to divest from many organizations on campus, Institute administration (herein simply the Institute) has ignored all of them by their allegiance to “academic freedom.” Even though I believe that it is easily arguable that protesters in the above situation are in the moral right and the Institute in the moral wrong, not much has actually changed in terms of protestor demands being met. In this essay, I try to understand the failings of current protestors through a survey of recent large-scale protests at MIT.

I. One Side’s Morals are Clearly Better Than the Others

The moral arguments of the protestors of many campaigns at MIT can effectively be generalized to Kant’s categorical imperative:

> Suppose there is some moral action X that implies a moral sentiment Y which contradicts some moral law Z.
> By way of contradiction, assume that it is morally permissible to do X.
> So Y is morally acceptable.
> But Y is in contradiction with Z.
> So it is not morally permissible to do X, so one is morally obligated to not do X.

Substituting X for “weapons research,” Y for “ending life is morally permissible,” and Z for “the human right to life,” we get Scientists Against Genocide et al.’s argument for why MIT should end its weapons research relationship with the MoD:

> By way of contradiction, assume that it is morally permissible to do weapons research.
> So ending life is morally acceptable.
> But believing that ending life is morally permissible is in contradiction with the human right to life.
> So it is not morally permissible to do weapons research, so one is morally obligated to not do weapons research.

Protestors usually bolster the above argument by also presenting reasoning for why doing X is of egregious moral harm.

Historically, the Institute has leaned on the moral principle of “academic freedom:”

Define free speech as the right to say whatever one wants however one wants, without any moral consequence.

Assume free speech can be shown to follow from the moral law.

By way of analogy, one should also have the right to research whatever one wants however one wants, without any moral consequence. Define this as academic freedom.

So, if free speech can be shown to follow from the moral law, one also has the right to academic freedom.

Because we’re in the context of the United States, where freedom of speech is a commonly accepted right, the Institute believes that implication elimination can be used, thus deriving academic freedom. The Institute then uses academic freedom in the following way: by academic freedom, it’s morally permissible for one to research A by any means B. Substituting A for “weapons” and B for “funding from a military body,” we then get the Institute’s argument for why MIT researchers are al-

lowed to do weapons research with the MoD: by academic freedom, it’s morally permissible for one to research weapons through funding from a military body.

I have no interest in defending the protestors’ argument; I hope it is self-evident to the reader. On the other hand, I do take issue with the Institute’s argument, as it is representative of a common misconstrued of what rights freedom of speech actually gives you. What the Institute defines as free speech is not the right as it is understood in the U.S. Bill of Rights (herein positive free speech), but instead a non-conservative extension known as absolute free speech.

Proponents of absolute free speech believe that speech should be a negative freedom: no one should be able to stop you from saying whatever you want. Positive free speech, in contrast, is a positive freedom: it limits what people can say—for example, hate speech is off-limits—so everyone has the opportunity to speak. There’s a reason why positive free speech is much more universally accepted than absolute free speech. You’d be pressed to, say, demand the right to vote if someone threw a slur at you every time you opened your mouth to speak, right? Connecting this to academic freedom by way of analogy, how can your research be morally permissible if it’s being used to stop other people from doing research?

Because of the above, I believe it’s obvious that Scientists Against Genocide et al. are in the moral right. Furthermore, they are justified in engaging in raucous protest: they believe their institution is enabling the revocation of the human right to life, an egregious harm! However, despite the strength of their moral arguments and their upping the anti over the 2023-24 school year,

on campus in the past 60 years. When they’re all put side by side, a general timeline of a campaign begins to form:

something of great moral urgency happens in the world
students and faculty recognize that the Institute is connected to the event

students and faculty organize, demanding that the Institute disassociate with the organizers of the event
the Institute fully or partially rejects demands

the situation loses its moral urgency due to lack of progress by protestors
“everyone” “moves on”

This pattern is concerning. It not only implies that the current campaign by Scientists Against Genocide et al. may end in failure, but that we as a community are caught in a local minimum regarding the best way to have our demands be met on campus, and are struggling to address the current state of affairs. This is not to say nonviolent protest is in general ineffective, but that a discussion must be had about what is and isn’t working for us as a community. I have no silver bullet, but I do want to spend the next section discussing how some aspects of the current philosophy of protest on campus are likely doing us no favors.

III. Divestment is Not a Sustainable Source of Justice

Divestment is a philosophy seen in all campaigns discussed above. The core idea of divestment is that supporting institutions that do bad things is wrong, so one should pressure institutions to stop supporting such bad institutions. This follows from Kantian ethics (treat all ends as means), but from practical first principles is not enough to create actual change. To ground my

divestment unintuitively looks like an easy layup. Engaging directly with “large” systems is complex and at times depressing. However, engaging with a “smaller” system that you think you’re much more familiar with—for example, your school—seems a lot easier and still allows you to make a difference: “surely, the people at our institution will understand our point of view and swiftly enact justice!” This point of view quickly falls apart when you realize that the reasons that it’s hard to engage with large systems—cultural inertia, entangled organizational hierarchies, externalities—also apply to smaller ones. Because everyone is fighting in smaller battles—demanding that the important, more personal institutions in their lives divest from “larger” institutions—most campaigns inevitably run into burn-out and moral urgency drying up, ultimately leading to a collective waste of resources which could have been better used if sharply focused on a higher-order cause. Divestment from morally bankrupt institutions is the morally right thing to do, but it is only one of many steps required to bring about justice, and it seems that, at least on our campus, demanding divestment first brings about the end of many a promising campaign.

Conclusion: What Next?

In this essay, I have argued the following:

a pattern of MIT protestors not having their demands be met by the Institute is showing,

the strength of protestors’ moral arguments is not what’s holding them back, and

a focus on divestment likely is.

I argue the above not because I want Scientists Against Genocide et al. to fail in their protests, but because I think

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New challenges await Coalition for Palestine as it heads into fall

Coalition for Palestine, from Page 1

MIT is also being investigated by the committee: Kornbluth first testified before the group—alongside Gay and Magill—in a December 2023 hearing that in the coming months predicated increasingly vocal calls for the presidents’ ousters. Kornbluth has, so far, overcome the calls of her detractors and maintained her hold on the Institute’s administration.

But back in the spring, Kornbluth’s future as MIT’s chief executive was much less certain.

The few weeks that followed SAGE’s creation were frenzied: the fledgling settlement’s presence escalated the pro-Palestinian student movement’s clashes with Institute administrators, city and state (and national) leaders, and their pro-Israeli peers; numerous failed attempts at negotiations between the encampment’s leaders and Kornbluth’s administration that only furthered each side’s conviction of the other’s “bad-faith” intentions; protests and counter-protests that only increased in size, frequency, and intensity; and a swarm of media coverage that put the Institute on national and international spotlight.

Monday, May 6 was the moment that finally erupted the burgeoning tensions: a sudden evacuation order by the administration against the encampment kicked campus into high gear, and hundreds of demonstrators, counter-demonstrators, and spectators swarmed the Student Center plaza that day as immediate retaliations by the encampment group that would later be condemned as “violent” temporarily repelled the Institute from further action.

The uneasy peace was not to last.

On Tuesday, Jewish and Israeli community members went ahead with a celebration on Kresge Oval of Yom Ha’atzmaut, the Israeli Day of Independence, that was originally postponed due to the encampment’s presence. The two sects’ attempts to concurrently co-opt the space for political activity in the past weeks led to clashes that included tense but nonviolent pro-Israeli skirmishes into the encampment, pro-Palestinian demonstrators painting bloody hands on nearby Israeli flags, and unsubstantiated reports of a supposed counter-encampment that ultimately never materialized.

On Wednesday, pro-Palestinian protestors began to receive notices of suspension from the administration. Earlier that day, a group of protestors clashed with MIT Police as the group attempted to blockade the driveway of the Stata Center garage on Vassar Street. They would attempt to do so again the following day.

On Thursday, a second attempt at a blockade of the garage driveway led to eight arrests of MIT students. (Initial reporting described nine arrests, mistakenly including the arrest of a Wellesley student in the tally.)

And on Friday, the inevitable end of the encampment came as a Kornbluth-authorized 4 a.m. police raid swept up the Kresge Oval space and made ten additional arrests.

The tally of arrests by the end of the week was up at 23. (Five students were also arrested in late April during the crackdown on Emerson College’s encampment.)

Though Kornbluth’s administration was fully and unquestioningly supported by the Institute’s governing board, the MIT Corporation, all throughout last year, any and all of her efforts were under relentless public fire on the ground. Protests and strife—between and amongst students, faculty, alumni, and administrators—continued to headline the rest of the month. Two closed-door faculty meetings

held in the middle of May mulled over what was to become of the numerous students suspended by Kornbluth’s order.

23 students, undergraduate and graduate, were suspended from MIT—all pro-Palestinian, and all in connection with the May 6 incident. The administration eventually pulled back 21 of the 23 suspensions by the time of commencement. Over the summer, the remaining two suspensions were also lifted. Relevant campus bans for the suspended protestors who were ultimately permitted to graduate last spring continue to be in force; the Graduate Student Union (GSU) has engaged in a months-long back and forth in securing the dismissal of these bans for the handful of current graduate students the action continues to affect (including two chief stewards for the union).

Amidst all of this, the Coalition for Palestine (C4P), the figurehead of the campus protest movement, has only continued to swell in numbers and notoriety.

The Coalition for Palestine

The coalition, which has upheld a strongly anti-Zionist stance since its founding in October of last year—in its inception, thrown together by an emergency meeting between the Coalition Against Apartheid (CAA) and several aligned student organizations in response to the Hamas-led October 7 attacks that gave rise to this newest stage in the long-running conflict between Gaza and Israel—has taken to championing a complete divestment of the Institute from all of its current Israeli ties, both financial and academic.

The group is an alliance of 18 member organizations at the Institute: MIT Alumni for Palestine, Asian American Initiative (AAI), Arab Student Organization (ASO), Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA), Black Students Union (BSU), CAA, The Disability Justice Collective, MIT Divest, MIT DUSP Students for Palestine Liberation, Faculty & Staff For Palestine, Graduates for Palestine (G4P), Globally Indigenous Students For Justice (IS4J), Jews for Collective Liberation (JCL), Muslims for Justice, Palestine@MIT, MIT Taara, Reading for Revolution, and Written Revolution.

(JCL was previously known as the Jews for Ceasefire, but has since rebranded to represent the broader formation of a so-called non-Zionist community of Jews and Israelis at the Institute.)

These coalition-forming groups, a mix of students, affiliated employees, faculty and staff, and alumni, are in various stages of official recognition by the Institute.

Other campus groups and student leaders have also variously come forward in support of the coalition and its mission, although remain organizationally distanced from it.

The campus movement is part of a nationwide student movement entering its second year, and is frequently in collaboration with other area student organizations (such as Harvard’s Palestine Solidarity Committee and Students for Justice in Palestine at Tufts University) and

local chapters of larger regional groups (such as the Boston Coalition for Palestine, Party for Socialism & Liberation, BDS Boston, and the Palestinian Youth Movement).

Student support for the Palestinian cause has long been present in campuses but has never seen a level of such widespread zeal, community support, and public scrutiny until this past year. The nationwide student movement has since been compared to movements such as the anti-Vietnam War protests and the anti-South African Apartheid protests. (At MIT, specifically, much comparison has been placed between last spring’s pro-Palestinian encampment and CAA’s so-called “Shantytown” of 1987.)

C4P’s founding principle, the Scientists Against Apartheid pledge, calls on signees to reject working for an identified list of companies and organizations that protestors say have ties with the Israeli occupation of Palestine. (The pledge currently has over a thousand publicly identified signees as per its page on the CAA website, largely undergraduate and graduate students.) The coalition contin-

of Defense, and with the removal of Israeli-aligned companies from the Industrial Liaison Program.

A quiet campus within a so-called “summer of rage”

Several organizers from C4P say they have no current plans to return to an encampment-style action in the near future, but declined to elaborate on the specifics of ongoing efforts in pushing their cause.

Still, it is evident that their efforts have become more pronounced and aggressive in promoting a strongly anti-Zionist stance, although continuing to be publicly disengaged from direct warfare with groups such as Israel Alliance and MIT Hillel.

Novel actions well outside the scope of a “traditional” protest or march, in an attempt to draw out more support from undecided or disengaged community members rather than centering efforts on those already committed to their cause, have pressed forward an undercurrent of growing public sympathy.

Over the summer, most of the coalition’s at-home efforts were directed to strategizing and long-

term planning, as well as community gatherings and the more civil aspects of their would-be community. The campus was quiet and free from the spectacle that had clutched the spring semester.

The most vocal actions, themselves subdued in comparison to many of the coalition’s other ventures, that took place on campus occurred in mid-July, during a greater city-wide “week of action” headed by BDS Boston.

At MIT, coalition organizers planned a July 15 pop-up at the Stata Center that claimed a portion of the seating areas between Rooms 124 and 144 as the “Sufyan Tayeh Classroom.” (The group previously set up a similar exhibit with the

same name and in the same area in mid-May.) The exhibit was meant to push against MIT’s affiliations with Elbit Systems, a defense company, with a second pop-up against Maersk, an affiliated shipping and logistics company, being planned for the following day.

On-campus were not likely to attract much attention at the time, so instead the coalition had set its sights to stronger engagement across greater Boston. Mutual aid campaigns, support for various underserved communities, participation in leftist actions highlighted the efforts of a community that sought to use its resources to assist other groups outside of MIT.

Coalition members participated in other types of protests, both at MIT and beyond, such as the Bangladeshi support protests co-organized by area student cultural groups (including MIT BSA, the Institute’s network for Bangladeshi students). They also travelled out of Boston to support in larger-scale and larger-impact actions, such as the Washington D.C. protests on June 8 and July 24.

The coalition continues to provide support well outside of MIT grounds, even as it restarts its operations on campus. And as the coalition continues its work, so does the administration.

A watchful administration

One such campus event held during orientation week drew the attention of President Sally Kornbluth, whose neutral public tones belied the tenseness of an administration more ready to stamp out kindling flames.

Kornbluth, who is Jewish, has become increasingly vocal regarding her disapproval of the coalition’s actions since the end of the fall semester. Her administration’s criticisms and responses became less reserved over time — empty threats and warnings eventually snowballed to suspensions and bans and authorized arrests.

Also underscoring a more readied police force, squads of MIT Police officers at times materialize in different parts of campus to events, or sometimes even to just spots of known protestors gathering (regardless of reason); metal fencing and other blockade methods are extensively set up in advance of protest action, and rapid responses of Cambridge Police and state police officers who quickly arrive on-site as needed highlight greater coordination than was seen in the spring.

A watchful and wary administration has had hawk eyes sighted on the coalition and its most vocal members; pro-Palestinian students say they have been at times followed by police officers, dispatched to scenes of what most times appear to be usual student activities. Administrators and MITPD detectives seem to be significantly less discreet about recording and photographing students, particularly during protests, as observed by The Tech in varying circumstances.

Over the summer, the coalition’s Stata Center exhibit on July 15 was flagged by a group of administrators and police officers, who confronted coalition organizers about the roughly two dozen-person group. The administrators made reference to a violation of the poster policy that the event, which was unregistered as the seating area is not a bookable space on its own, had to be taken down. Two weeks later, on July 31, emails popped up in several of the student attendees’ inboxes from the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards—similar to the letters that many of them had received last spring for protest activity—that they had violated Institute use of facilities and free expression policies.

Reportedly, all of those cases were resolved without issue. And then a month later, another unprompted, this time from the Committee on Discipline, was reportedly circulated through executive committees of many of the Coalition for Palestine’s member organizations: the organizations, for their participation and enabling of protest activity, were under investigation. (As of now, no developments regarding the investigation are known to have occurred.)

The administration has yet to comprehensively respond to the two actions that have taken place this fall.

In the midst of all of this, coalition organizers say they have no active channels of communication with the administration. Major organization-level communications seem to have ceased since the breakdown of encampment-related negotiations last May and also on a more individual level as the various interim suspension cases were sporadically resolved.

Conflicting interpretations of what “free expression” means for an Institute fractured along political lines has long been a source of opposition between the coalition and the administration. It can only be expected to worsen as the campus pro-Palestinian movement continues to struggle against the administration’s tightening fist.



OMAR OROZCO - THE TECH

Students fill the sidewalk of Mass Ave during a demonstration outside of Lobby 7.

ues to table the pledge’s platform at booths across campus, at times the limited booth allocations fronted by other member organizations.

At times, the lines between coalition members become blurred, as rotating groups act as the faces of assorted protest-aligned actions to cover up substantial involvement in outlawed types of disruptions that the administration may flag — causing public confusion in how the various groups actually work alongside one another.

Over the spring, for example, and especially during the height of administrative scrutiny of the embattled advocacy group, the CAA kept its efforts as off the radar as possible. The group continued to help plan and attend protest actions but relied on the Coalition for Palestine moniker to present various protests as coming from different sects of the movement.

C4P, headed by a new group of committee heads that took up the mantle over the summer, held its first member-wide meeting of this semester on September 9, a step forward in the systematization of a swelling community.

Organizers from the coalition say that the group’s current efforts lie in the cutting of all Institute research funded by and otherwise affiliated with the Israeli Ministry